VTAAP Clarification of Issues, Notifications & Reminders (12/7/09)

To Student Educational Teams (SET),

The message below addresses many of the questions, concerns and issues that have been received so far. We feel it is important to allow educators to make their own decisions about what information is useful for their own work, so we offer these comprehensive notes but in the most succinct manner possible. Read and use in a way that works for you.

As we close in on the due date for the first set of student forms for the VTAAP, we clearly see that questions, road-blocks and challenges are increasing. We truly appreciate *all* the feedback – successes and frustrations – especially those that include specific suggestions, stories, or questions.

The initial "reply all" emails had a pattern of "Oh, it's not just me!" that we feel is important to address. We know that this new assessment format represents a significant shift in practice, even for educators who are qualified, knowledgeable, and effective teachers. The expectations set forth by this assessment are not meant to invalidate the current practices of special educators – the purpose is to *add to* or *enhance* those practices by incorporating new program elements that have been identified as important and beneficial for students with the most significant needs.

We feel we have established an effective format and identified appropriate content for this assessment, and it is revealing some of the unmet needs in the field. Proper support for this process likely involves training, professional development, time, general education support, administration support, dissemination of resources….etc. Providing this support in advance of this assessment, as opposed to reactively, would clearly be the preferred sequence and is a valid criticism. We are aware of the mismatch between the assessment requirements and the experiences of many educators, particularly in the familiarity with the grade expectations at the level of the entry points and appropriate integration of the grade level general education curriculum (GLGEC). Our challenge is that we do not have the option to delay this process any longer to accommodate advance support, so we are being required to look at what we can do to remediate the situation starting now.

We have identified a number of messages that we feel are important to share with the entire group of educators, via this VTAAP listserv. The notes below are clarifications of issues that seem to be recurring, and notifications or reminders related to the general VTAAP assessment process. We hope this will be helpful.

- **Online forums:** We are in the process of creating additional online forums for allowing this group to communicate in a variety of ways (e.g. discussions, share resources, Q and A, etc.). We will move quickly to establish these venues, and appreciate that in the meantime the VTAAP listserv is used only by the DOE to disseminate pertinent assessment information. This is not to restrict the expression of opinions, but out of respect for educators that have indicated a desire to only receive the official, assessment-related posts.

- **Direct questions or communications:** If you have a specific question, idea, or concern that you would like to share, please call Cyndie or Greg or write an email to either of us. When emails are sent directly to us at the DOE, we can be sure to respond. It is often unclear to us whether the sender of a "reply all" email is looking for a response, so direct contact will be the most efficient method for both. We understand "reply all" is often hit inadvertently, so please try to remember to double-check your "to" field.

- **Dissemination of materials:** Some educators have expressed a desire for more support, more resources, and more help via the listserv information and attachments. Others have indicated being overwhelmed by the quantity of materials they are receiving. We will look at the new online resources as a potential vehicle for disseminating the supplementary resources and restricting the VTAAP listserv to the documents that are necessary to complete the assessment. Until we are able to create this additional means, we will continue to send "essential" and "additional" documents via this listserv.

- **Essential vs. Additional Resources:** The documents that you have received so far represent both "essential" and "additional" resources. We are reviewing them currently, so that we can identify the "must have/use" docs and the "if you want/need them" docs. As a general rule, the VTAAP Administration Guidelines and the GE entry points, combined with the online forms, provide the information you need to complete the portfolio. The Measuring Student Performance: Baseline Guides (MSP), AT Supports, data sheets etc. are resources that you can choose to reference if you want more clarification or detail about the process. There have been virtually no changes or additions to the VTAAP process since the initial trainings and dissemination of documents. Read only as much as you need/want to feel comfortable with your interpretation of what is required. If you are confident in your understanding of the GEs, task analyzing the entry point targets, and using supports or adaptations then you do not need to reference those documents. Documents that are not used at baseline may still be useful for instruction (e.g. MSPs, AT Supports), so save them and review them over time as is useful.

- **Organizing files:** Creating a folder called "VTAAP" on your desktop to hold all downloads from us may be a temporary solution, containing the volume of "paper" in a specific location that can be accessed if/when you need it. We are also looking at using a consistent file-naming system that allows you to see the type of document, grade, type of document etc. so you can more easily recognize the content.

- **Success stories:** Please continue to send your success stories, new understandings, and specific student examples. We are collecting these with the hopes of sharing them in some usable way at some point. We have seen/heard and would like to know more of impacts on: general education curriculum access, communication skills, learning opportunities, collegial connections, improvements in performance or engagement, etc.

- **Sample Portfolios:** Some of you are clearly requesting "modeling" of completed portions of the portfolio. We recognize the value of "I do, we do, you do" approach to instruction, so agree it is good practice for adult learners as well. There have been two barriers to posting completed examples: one is time and the other is the potential for overgeneralization. Priority has gone to the training, response to SET concerns, and creation of documents to support the application process. The second issue is the concern that the example(s) shown can restrict educators' ideas about what a particular GE, entry point, or grade look like. It is a natural tendency to stay close to what you know works, and previous experiences reflect a much higher percentage of submissions that mirror the examples. So we want to pick the examples carefully, and provide as broad a perspective as possible. We <u>will</u> provide those examples.

- **Data GEs:** Because we've had a few emails about this, we are re-stating one of the Q and A's from the Baseline Guide:

  Q – *The VTAAP Entry Points Document shows a GE number for data and statistics that is different than the one in this document for the same grade. Are you changing the GE now?!*

A – The short answer is that the assessment requirements for data have not changed from the GE Entry Points document. The entry point behaviors for all grades essentially said "the student has to complete the data collection process". The DSP Baseline Guide says "the student has to complete the data collection process, and we are going to restrict the scoring to one part of this process". Whether the SET completes and documents the entire data collection sequence at baseline (per the initial entry points document) or if they focus on the parts of the sequence indicated in the DSP Baseline document, their submission should be appropriate. The specific GE number currently indicated on the DSP Baseline document and online is the correct number, but should not affect the baseline task.

- **Multiple Baselines:** Remember that although December 15th is the deadline for entering all GE entry points and measurement of baseline tasks, you do have the opportunity to collect additional baseline measure(s) beyond December 15th. The SET may identify changes in supports or adaptations that were not reflected in the original baseline, or later feel that the SET's interpretation of the entry point was not quite accurate. This is a "second chance" to fix the baseline measure before submitting it at endline. We will be establishing a "cut off" date for this additional baseline measure, likely around the midpoint (February 15th). We will keep you posted on that, and in the meantime review the relevant MSP Baseline Guide for reading or math if you want more details.

- **Training Scorers:** We are starting to identify individuals who are interested in being trained to be scorers of portfolios and/or be local resources for the assessment. We are interested in a range of roles being represented such as special educators, general educators, and related service providers. If you are interested, know someone who is, or want more information, please email us. We want to start meeting regularly after the Christmas break.

- **Sample Product Submissions:** We will also be soliciting examples of strand products shortly after midline (February 15) that can be used to help us prepare the scoring guidelines. In exchange for submitting the product and related documents (e.g. baseline, annotation), the SET will receive formal feedback on the submission. The SET can then make any suggested changes prior to the actual submission of the product as part of the portfolio. Stay tuned for specifics on when, how, who etc., as we will need to regulate the samples to be most useful and manageable, but please keep it in mind.

- **Scoring Guides:** For the first time the SET will have detailed scoring guides for each GE prior to the local scoring. You will have access to the details, descriptions and features that will be the basis of the "0 1 2" rating. Again, the idea is to provide this information prior to submission so the SET can identify issues that may negatively impact the student's performance score and potentially correct or clarify the information. The MSP Baseline guide will form the basis of the Scoring Guide, along with the Administration Guidelines for Scoring, and can be used by the SET to guide instruction and product features throughout the year.

- **Ch-ch-ch-changes:** The significant changes in the VTAAP in the last year have created significant impacts for everyone connected to the assessment. At the local level alone, effects are felt by the student and special educator, the general educator, parents, related service providers and administrators. As the provider of assessed instruction, the Special Educators' roles and responsibilities have been impacted more than anyone else so far. The irony is that

it is the degree of change that is our best guarantee of stability for the future. The band-aid we've been slowly removing for the last few years has been whisked off, and we are now in a place to focus on dealing with "what is". The VTAAP now represents rigorous, challenging, accessible educational targets, is strongly aligned with the GLGEC, is associated with best practice for full educational opportunity, and complies with federal and state requirements. The process, materials, and content that you have been working with this year are proving to be stronger with time, and are not a moving target. We expect to make some adjustments, since responding to results is one of the features of a good assessment, but still have no plan to make any major revisions. We have a history of yearly change to overcome, but hope that the significance of the differences being experienced this year is an indicator that this isn't the "same-old, same-old".

A final note: As you likely know from the recent round of emails, many of your colleagues are feeling the same concerns about their ability to meet the steep VTAAP expectations. Although large-scale assessment is an evaluation of individual student learning based on instruction, the status of instruction across the state also has an impact on students' final achievement level. Portfolios are scored according to established standards (e.g. scoring guide), but these scores are then grouped together with all the students in the state to determine proficiency levels. If many educators are struggling, then the student's products may show lower scores, but these will be "scaled" so the set of scores span the proficiency levels from high to low. The SET's ability to meet the expectations of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and VTAAP is more strongly impacted by their willingness to take steps towards these targets than by anything else. By taking small actions, asking "how?" as opposed to "why?", shifting the emphasis of the student's educational program to the GLGEC supported/supplemented by the IEP, asking for assistance and taking advantage of resources ....these will definitely result in improved outcomes for our students, and should also be reflected in improving achievement on the assessment.